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DAWN

PIA union makes vain effort to stall airline sale

• People's Unity alleges privatisation bidding process lacked transparency; employees barred from participation
• Claims collective bargaining agent has expertise to turn around loss-making flag carrier

By Khaleeq Kiani

ISLAMABAD: In what appeared to be a lost battle, the PIA Employees' Combined Bargaining Agent (CBA), People's Unity, has asked the government to put on hold the signing of the airline's share purchase agreement (SPA) and the transfer of management control to the Arif Habib-led consortium until consideration of its reservations and a counter-offer.

In a letter to PIA's board of directors, the Ministry of Defence and the Ministry of Privatisation, the union alleged that the privatisation process culminating in the bidding was non-transparent, claiming that employees were not allowed to participate. It said the CBA had the expertise to turn around the loss-making national carrier through professional management and a competent board.

People's Unity President Hidayatullah Khan said the government was repeating "the blunder" of selling the airliner to Arif Habib Group, whose earlier takeover attempt of Pakistan Steel Mills was declared illegal by the Supreme Court two decades ago and which had only recently penalised by the Competition Commission of Pakistan for cartelisation in steel sector.

The union said that, as the CBA, it represented employees and was a key stakeholder. "We applied to participate in the bidding process for healthy competition but were declined by the Privatisation Commission," Mr Khan said.

He added that the union had "serious reservations" about the privatisation of Pakistan International Airlines Corporation Ltd (PIACL) and the transfer of 75pc shares with management control, alleging the process lacked transparency and "valuation of assets".

The union further alleged that the process — from expression of interest to bidding, approved by the Cabinet Committee on Privatisation (CCOP) and the cabinet — was conducted "without due diligence", and claimed it bypassed the Council of Common Interests (CCI).

It also argued that the PIA Act, amended in 2016, authorised the conversion of PIA into a public limited company but did not permit "outright privatisation" through the transfer of majority control.

The union demanded an urgent meeting before the SPA is signed and management transferred "to avoid repetition of blunders" in earlier privatisation efforts.

Quoting the Supreme Court's 2006 ruling in the PSM case, the union said the apex court had held that the privatisation process was vitiated by acts of omission and commission, including alleged violations of mandatory legal provisions and rules, which affected decisions on prequalification, valuation and the final terms offered and declared the process void and of no legal effect.

People's Unity also alleged that Arif Habib Group and its facilitators (Public Office Holders) remained unaccountable despite Supreme Court observation and prequalified for PIACL privatisation prior to disposal of its review petition in the PSM case, which is still pending in the Supreme Court.

It alleged that Ayesha Steel Mills, owned by Arif Habib Group, and International Steels Ltd (ISL) were involved in cartelisation and penalised by the Competition Commission of Pakistan in October 2025 and were imposed a fine of Rs1.5 billion.

The union contended that blaming PIA and its employees for the carrier's performance was unjustified, arguing that outcomes were shaped by the commercial policies and priorities of management and the board.

Threatening to challenge the case before the parliamentary committees and other appropriate courts of law, the People's Unity pointed out that the PIA Act 1956 (as amended in 2016), the SOEs Act 2023 and the NAB Ordinance required management performance monitoring. "The PIA would have not been in this situation if any system of check and balance and performance monitoring exist," it added.

It claimed that the PIA workforce had better knowledge and experienced to turn around the airline, if a knowledgeable board of directors and professional management played its role without privatisation.

The CBA offered to provide all technical and financial details with clarifications to the Ministry of Defence, Special Investment Facilitation Council (SIFC), the Privatisation Commission and the parliamentary committees as to how to turn around the PIACL instead of "wasting time and money in unnecessary litigation".

ACTIVISTS participate in a torch-bearing rally organised by Pasban-i-Hurriyat Jammu Kashmir in Muzaffarabad to press for the right to self-determination for the people of India-held Kashmir.—Text and photo by Tariq Naqash

Pakistan calls for Kashmir plebiscite on Right to Self-Determination Day

• AJK PM urges UN to help resolve Kashmir issue • Zardari says denial of self-determination violates United Nations Charter • Shehbaz links Kashmir settlement to peace in S. Asia

ISLAMABAD: President Asif Ali Zardari, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, Balochistan chief minister and the president and premier of Azad Jammu and Kashmir on Sunday renewed calls for the implementation of United Nations resolutions on the region, as the country observed Jan 5 as Right to Self-Determination Day.

In separate messages, they reiterated Pakistan's moral, political and diplomatic support for Kashmiris, urged the international community to press India to reverse its Aug 5, 2019, actions and called for a UN-backed plebiscite to determine the region's future.

In his message, President Zardari said Jan 5 was observed in solidarity with the people of Jammu and Kashmir to mark the adoption of a 1949 United Nations resolution recognising the disputed status of the territory and affirming the Kashmiri people's right to determine their future through a free and impartial plebiscite.

He noted that more than seven decades later, the commitment made by the United Nations remained unfulfilled, adding that the passage of time had neither weakened the validity of UN resolutions nor diminished the legitimacy of the Kashmiri people's demand for self-determination. The continued denial of this right, he said, was in clear contradiction to the UN Charter and international law.

'Durable peace in S. Asia'

In his message, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif also said that the world must recognise that a just resolution of the Jammu and Kashmir dispute was the only way to achieve durable peace in South Asia.

"We urge the international community to urgently call upon India to halt its widespread human rights violations in IIOJK (Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir), reverse its unilateral and illegal actions of Aug 5, 2019, repeal the draconian laws and give the right to self-determination to the Kashmiri people, as enshrined in the United Nations Security Council resolutions," he said.

"Pakistan will continue to extend its unwavering moral, political, and diplomatic support to your cause, and will continue to serve as your voice at every available platform," he said.

'Not a political slogan'

Balochistan Chief Minister Sarfraz Bugti said that Right to Self-Determination Day serves as a reminder to the international community that the Kashmiri people's right to self-determination is not a political slogan but a legally recognised international commitment enshrined in United Nations Security Council resolutions, which remains unfulfilled to this day.

In his message, the chief minister recalled that on Jan 5, 1949, the United Nations Commission for India and Pakistan adopted a resolution granting the people of Jammu and Kashmir the right to determine their future through a free, fair and impartial plebiscite.

He said India's continued illegal occupation and intransigence have consistently violated this international pledge.

Meanwhile, Azad Jammu and Kashmir President Barrister Sultan Mahmood Chaudhry called upon the international community, particularly the United Nations, to play an effective role in resolving the Kashmir issue in accordance with the wishes of the Kashmiri people and relevant UN resolutions.

In his special message on the occasion, President Chaudhry said that the Kashmiri people have rendered unprecedented sacrifices to achieve their right to self-determination, which was guaranteed to them by none other than the United Nations.

He said that the Kashmiri people firmly believe in the territorial integrity of the erstwhile state of Jammu and Kashmir and regard it as an indivisible entity. He said that despite using all means of oppression, India has failed to dampen the Kashmiris' passion and spirit for freedom.

Separately, AJK Prime Minister Faisal Mumtaz Rathore urged the United Nations to discharge its legal and moral responsibilities to help resolve the long-standing Kashmir dispute in line with the Kashmiris' wishes and aspirations.

In his special message, the prime minister expressed dismay over the UN's lackadaisical approach towards the issue, saying it was unfortunate that the promise of the right to self-determination made by the UN to the Kashmiri people seven decades ago is yet to be fulfilled.

He said that holding a plebiscite in Kashmir, as per the UN-proposed roadmap, remains the primary responsibility of the international community.—APP

Balochistan public bodies disclosed 48pc of required information: Fafen

Latest report reveals autonomous bodies performed best with 59pc disclosure, followed by attached depts at 46pc

By Iftikhar A. Khan

ISLAMABAD: Public bodies in Balochistan proactively disclose an average of 48 per cent of the information required under the Balochistan Right to Information (BRTI) Act, 2021.

This was revealed in the latest transparency assessment report released by the Free and Fair Election Network (Fafen).

The assessment forms part of Fafen's "Countering Disinformation through Information" campaign, which highlights the importance of proactive disclosures by public authorities in strengthening institutional transparency and countering mis- and disinformation.

Fafen reviewed 66 public bodies in Balochistan, including 39 secretariat departments, 12 attached departments, and 15 autonomous bodies, against the proactive disclosure requirements outlined in Section 5 of the BRTI Act. The law mandates the disclosure of nine categories of information and emphasises the publication of updated information in accessible formats, including online platforms.

Overall, autonomous bodies performed relatively better, disclosing an average of 59pcof the required information, followed by attached departments at 46pc, while secretariat departments lagged behind at 44pc.

Among the secretariat departments, the Agriculture and Cooperatives, Information, Planning and Development, and Urban Planning and Development Departments emerged as most transparent, each disclosing 70pc of the required information. Among attached departments, the Gwadar Development Authority and Provincial Disaster Management Authority led with 60pc compliance. Among autonomous bodies, the Balochistan Education and Endowment Fund and the University of Turbat disclosed 80pc of the required information.

Despite these high-performing public bodies, the assessment identified widespread gaps in compliance. A large number of public bodies disclosed only 40–50pc of the required information, while several others fell further behind, disclosing as little as 10–30pc.

Basic organisational information — such as functions, duties, and institutional structure — was the most commonly disclosed category, available on 98pc of public bodies' websites. Legal frameworks governing operations were accessible on 80pc of the assessed websites, while 73pc disclosed information related to public services and service delivery conditions.

Only 21pc of public bodies published some budget-related information, including proposed or actual expenditures.

UN body to help country develop its energy transition plan

By Amin Ahmed

ISLAMABAD: The United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UN-ESCAP) will provide policy advisory and technical support to energy financing to assist Pakistan in the development of its Energy Transition Investment Plan (ETIP).

At the request of the government, a scoping mission of UN-ESCAP visited Pakistan recently, and held talks with ministries concerned and development partners to understand the needs, challenges, and opportunities in Pakistan on energy transition financing. The team obtained a deep understanding of entry points to building a strong ETIP and understanding where challenges and opportunities may lie, UN-ESCAP says.

The country's energy transition is critical for economic resilience, climate commitments, and fiscal stability. Heavy reliance on imported fossil fuels, coupled with a circular debt crisis exceeding Rs2.6 trillion, underscores the urgency of shifting to renewables to meet energy needs by 2030. However, challenges like policy inconsistencies, fossil fuel dependency, and limited concessional financing hinder progress.

To bridge this gap, the ETIP can assist Pakistan by working to attract green foreign direct investment and leverage blended finance models that combine public and philanthropic funds to unlock private capital. Concessional funding — including low-interest loans and guarantees — is essential to make renewable energy projects financially viable, especially for underserved communities.

Existing work on Green Eurobonds, Panda Bonds, and Green Sukuk, alongside pay-as-you-go models should be bolstered to attract investment. There is also a need to investigate how funds support grid modernisation efforts, which are critical to answering Pakistan's circular debt and integrating distributed solar and battery systems into the national energy infrastructure, ESCAP suggests.

UN-ESCAP through its Financing Energy Transition (FET) work which provided targeted technical assistance to Indonesia, the Philippines and Vietnam, has expressed its readiness to support Pakistan government with its expertise on the issue in conjunction with ESCAP's existing work with Pakistan.

ESCAP's FET work stream has already produced three analytical reports identifying critical gaps in energy transition finance, complemented by country-level capacity-building sessions and sub-regional policy dialogues in Southeast Asia. ESCAP through its expertise on integrated energy transition planning, capacity building, and scenario analysis may help contribute to Pakistan's ETIP and its efforts on the national energy mix, industrial competitiveness, and progress towards Net-Zero emissions, while leveraging financial instruments such as green bonds and carbon markets, ESCAP says.

Pakistan's energy mix remains heavily skewed towards fossil fuels, with imported oil, LNG, and coal dominating the power generation landscape – posing persistent challenges to fiscal sustainability and energy security.

Pakistanis stuck in Afghanistan want border to reopen

Students, traders and others stranded since October; truck drivers rue their livelihood has dried up

SPIN BOLDAK: Nearly three months since border clashes prompted the closure of land crossings between Pakistan and Afghanistan, university students, merchants and families are left hanging with no way of getting back.

"We miss our parents and relatives," said Shah Faisal, 25, who studies medicine in an Afghan university and was hoping to visit his family back in Pakistan during winter break.

But the border has been shut since Oct 12, 2025, leaving many like him with no viable option of making it home.

Flights are prohibitively expensive, and smuggling routes come at too great a risk.

A student representative said there were around 500 to 600 Pakistanis at universities in one Afghan province alone, Nangarhar, who were looking for a way back.

Shah Fahad Amjad, 22, who attends medical school in the provincial capital Jalalabad, called on "both countries to open the road" and let students visit their families.

As the border closure drags on, some are also concerned about their visa status or financial situation.

The crisis has caused problems "for us, who are students in Afghanistan, but also for Afghans who are students in Pakistan", said 23-year-old Barkat Ullah Wazir, who studies in Jalalabad.

The colonial-era border between the South Asian neighbours stretches more than 2,600km across mountainous terrain.

'We are displaced'

The border has remained largely closed since the October clashes that killed more than 70 people, with the exception of Afghan refugees and migrants Pakistan has expelled.

Islamabad accused Kabul of harbouring militant groups that launch attacks on Pakistani soil, allegations that the Afghan Taliban denies.

Mediation efforts have failed to produce a lasting agreement, and both sides have warned fighting could still resume.

Pakistani shopkeeper Ehsanullah Himmat, 21, had travelled to the southern Afghan city of Kandahar with his family to attend a relative's wedding, but "now we cannot go back to our home", he said.

"Fighting broke out, the road was closed," he told *AFP*, turning the planned two-day trip into a lengthy ordeal with no end in sight.

"We cannot go via smuggling routes, and other routes exist but they are very long and cost a lot of money" that the family cannot afford, he said.

Now "it is cold, it's winter, and we are displaced with our children", Himmat said.

Relatives in Afghanistan have hosted the family, but he said he felt a sense of "embarrassment" for overstaying their welcome.

'Standstill'

Pakistan's foreign ministry said last week that nearly 1,200 people had approached its embassy in Kabul requesting assistance to return home, including 549 students.

Just over 300 people had flown back by the end of December, according to the ministry.

Neither government has given any clear signal about when or under what conditions the border could reopen.

At the Spin Boldak crossing point, the road leading into Pakistan is blocked.

Truck driver Khan Muhammad, 39, has been there for weeks on end, unable to work or return to his city of Quetta, about 100 kilometres (62 miles) from the border.

"In these two-and-a-half months I haven't loaded even a single kilo of cargo. Work has come to a standstill," he said.

"All our livelihoods depend on this gate," he said, hoping the border would reopen soon.

When it does, "everyone will be able to return to their homes", he said.—AFP